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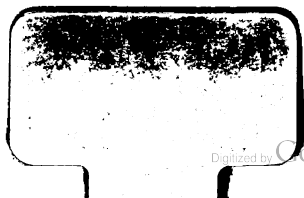
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PART I.]

[PRICE 6d.]

THE
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OF
LEIGHTON BUZZARD

AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD;

BEING THE FIRST OF

 Series of Lectures,

DELIVERED AT THE INSTITUTE,

BY THE

REV. JOSEPH STEVENSON, M.A.,

VICAR.

LEIGHTON BUZZARD:

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THE
EARLY HISTORY
OF
LEIGHTON BUZZARD,
AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD.

LECTURE I.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

WHEN the idea of the delivery of a series of Lectures was first discussed among us, one of the questions which naturally occupied our attention at the very outset was this: What are the Lectures to be about? That the Committee has made a judicious selection in proposing to speak to you upon such great and interesting matters as those which have already occupied your attention, is, I think, sufficiently proved by the success which has hitherto attended our meetings together in this place. But I speak with more hesitation in regard to the subject which is announced as forming the matter of this evening's Lecture,—I mean the early history of this town and neighbourhood. The selection of this topic suggested itself to one's mind naturally, and appeared to present at the first glance much which

recommended it. But a nearer inspection has convinced me that, in venturing at this time to stand before you as the expositor of the history of the past, as far as our good town is concerned, I am acting very unadvisedly, very rashly, perhaps very presumptuously. It is best to tell you the whole truth at once; I have been sadly disappointed in the amount, and the value, and the interest of the matter which bears upon the topic before us this evening. I had taken for granted that a town such as ours must have had its history; and in this I fancy I am not much to be blamed; but I had also unfortunately assumed that this history was accessible—that I had only to examine the usual depositories of old documents, and that I should there discover matter which would illustrate this subject, in which we are all so much interested. The search has been made—made to the best of my ability,—and I am sorry to be compelled to repeat, that the result is disappointing. There is not much to be found, and the little which is forthcoming is of no great interest. I have been able, it is true, to gather a few incidental notices of our town, but they are of such an obvious character, that they are probably as well known to yourselves as to me. I have examined the vast treasures of MS. lore deposited in our great national establishment, the British Museum, with scarce any addi-

tional benefit: and a careful search made by the Keeper of H. M. Records in the Tower—in which are preserved the greater mass of the early legal records of this kingdom—has been in no degree more satisfactory. One depository, it is true, remains unexamined,—I mean the Registry Office of the bishop of Lincoln. This parish was formerly in the diocese of Lincoln; indeed, its transfer into the diocese of Ely has been made within a very recent period. It is probable, therefore, that the early registers of the bishops of Lincoln would supply us with much interesting matter; but a journey to that place is a formidable undertaking: these documents therefore remain unexamined for the present. I labour then, at this time, under a double difficulty. Had it been in my power to have laid before you the result of these searches as fully and as satisfactorily as I had once anticipated, I should scarce have been able to realise the expectations which some among you may possibly have been pleased to form for yourselves; and I cannot but feel proportionably uncertain as to the result when I am compelled to admit at the outset that I have very little to bring before you. But if you will extend to me your usual kind and considerate attention,—if you will permit me to narrate to you in my own way the few remarks which I have to make, you will extricate me from my difficulty.

Trusting, therefore, to your good nature, I shall now proceed to lay before you such information as I have been able to collect respecting the early history of Leighton and its immediate neighbourhood.

I told you a few moments ago, that there was an unhappy deficiency of information respecting our town. It is not difficult in some degree to account for this. It was the seat of no great family, for the Leigh Lords resided here only accidentally, and at a comparatively recent period. It was the scene of no great battle. It is not situated in a border county, and therefore takes no place in the narrative of bloody feuds, such as those which were carried on between the English and the Welsh, or the English and the Scotch. It is not a seaport town, and therefore we have no assistance from those documents which illustrate our early naval history or commerce. In fact, the inhabitants of this town would appear to have been good, quiet, steady, sedate, well-behaved people. There is, I understand, a local proverb which gives them a different character, and that a very indifferent one. The proverb, as I have heard it, runs thus,—

Tring, Wing and Ivinghoe,
Three dirty villages all on a row;
And if you would know the reason why,
Leighton Buzzard is hard by.

I suspect this proverb is of no great antiquity, and I must do our ancestors the justice to say, that, as far as early history goes, it is a libel. But to return: the whole of Bedfordshire is, of a truth (speaking historically, be it remembered), a stupid county; and since I see a smile on the faces of some of our Linsdale neighbours, I may add that Bucks. is equally stupid,—still speaking historically. Take a circle of half-a-dozen miles round Leighton Buzzard, and you will not find such a thing as a ruined monastery or a mouldering castle: there are no traditions respecting a well-fought battle. There is not a single witch, I dare venture to affirm, in the whole parish. There is not, as far as I have been able to ascertain, a single ghost story, a solitary tradition, or a legend, or a superstition, in the whole neighbourhood. There is Woburn Abbey, it is true, but that is too far from home. There is the history of the family of Russell, but they came into Bedfordshire when the romance of history had ended. There is Battlesden, the name of which promises well; but history and tradition are equally silent as to the battle which it may be presumed was there stricken. I tell you this to prepare you for a dull, hard, dry detail of matters of fact; matters for which, if necessary, volume and page might be quoted. So now let us begin at the beginning of history, as far as its

authentic materials enable us to speak of events with precision.

We know very little of the early history of our country before the invasion of Julius Cæsar. The ancient Britons were a warlike people; and they were by no means deficient either in skill or courage, as the invading army soon discovered to their cost. Not only did they fight well in the field, but they constructed for themselves strongholds, generally upon the tops of lofty hills, and surrounded them with ramparts of earthwork, so well designed and so well executed that traces of many of them may be recognized to the present day, although the greater number have been removed by the progress of cultivation. The most remarkable specimen of this kind of fortification in our vicinity is at Totternhoe; and it must have been almost impregnable before the invention of gunpowder, if defended by a body of resolute men. Near our town, on the Heath, was an enclosure nearly circular, containing several fields surrounded by a ditch, which in some places was of considerable depth. There are probably many in this room who remember it. The enclosure of the Heath has now, I understand, nearly obliterated the outline. There are several other British remains in the county, but they are too far distant to be mentioned on this occasion.

When the Romans invaded Britain, now about 1900 years ago, this part of the country was inhabited by a people called the Cassii. In process of time they were dispossessed by the Romans, or merged with them in the formation of a race of Romanised Britons, who, along with much of the indomitable spirit of the aboriginal inhabitants, blended much of the cultivated taste of the Italian conquerors of the greater part of the world. These Romans have left amongst us some traces of their existence. Besides some others of lesser importance, to which I need not now allude, Bedfordshire possesses the remains of two of the great Roman roads. One of these, that nearest to us, is called the Watling Street, which gives its name, as you will remember, to an important mercantile street in London. Dunstable is built upon this road. Passing Tilsworth, it proceeds between Hockliffe and Battlesden; and it then crosses the road from Leighton Buzzard to Woburn, at about midway between these two towns.

Another Roman road, the Ikenild Street, passes between Luton and Bedford; it then pushes on to Dunstable, where it crosses the Watling Street, leading up to an ancient British encampment called the Maiden Bower; it then becomes very indistinct, but enters Bucks. a little below Edgeborough. Besides these great monuments of their military skill

and patience, the Romans have left few remains of their existence in Bedfordshire. Some were formerly dug up at a place called Chesterfield, between Bedford and Biggleswade. They consisted of urns of no great beauty of either design or execution. During the enclosure of the Heath near this town, several specimens of pottery were discovered, some few fragments of which are still in the possession of Mr. E. Lawford, by whose kindness I am now enabled to produce them for your inspection. They are of poor workmanship and of coarse material: so poor indeed as to make it doubtful whether they ought not rather to be referred to an earlier and less cultivated period of history than that which is associated with the name of Roman. But the remains are too fragmentary to admit of any certain decision as to the era to which they properly belong.

We now reach the Anglo-Saxon period. The first historical event which we find connected with this county, brings with it something which perhaps bears upon the subject more immediately before us; but on this point I speak with much hesitation. About the year 580 a battle was fought at Bedford between the British inhabitants of the county and the West Saxon king, Cuthwulf. You are aware that the Saxons had invaded this country, and were gradually driving out the original possessors of the

soil, or reducing them to a state of slavery. The battle of Bedford ended in the defeat of the Britons; and the consequence was that the Saxons gained possession of four of the most important towns, or strongholds, in the neighbourhood. We can identify three of these; but about the fourth there is some little degree of uncertainty. Bensington and Ensham, at some distance from us, were two; the third was then called Eglesburgh, the modern Aylesbury; and the fourth is said to have been Leighton Buzzard. Although this is generally asserted by men from whose conclusions it is not safe to depart without good grounds for the departure, yet I may affirm that there is no certain evidence that the place called in those days Lygeanburgh, was our town of Leighton. That it was somewhere in the neighbourhood is probable, since it capitulated in consequence of the battle at Bedford. I am inclined to doubt the accuracy of the theory, however, which makes this Lygeanburgh the same as our Leighton, and I will mention my reasons presently. Excepting this very dubious occurrence, no other notice of Bedfordshire occurs during the Saxon period,—as far as we are concerned, at least. It proved part of the ancient kingdom of Mercia, the largest, the most powerful, and the most important of the kingdoms of the heptarchy.

We sometimes gain a hint towards the history of a place, or a district, even from a name. I mentioned Totternhoe a few minutes since; it may serve as an illustration of what I mean. You will remember, such of you as have seen the place, that it is situated on an eminence. But any one acquainted with the Anglo-Saxon language, even without having ever seen the locality, could have told you this much about its situation. All places the names of which end with *hoe*, must be loftily situated; for in the early language of this island *hoe* signifies a HILL. I have never seen Bletsoe, nor Ivinghoe, nor Risinghoe, nor Cainhoe; but I venture to affirm that they are all situated on or near rising grounds; and I believe there are ruined castles on most, if not all, of these eminences. Take another example. There is near Woburn a parish called Eversholt. The name tells us something of its history. It was formerly a wood or *holt*, overrun by wild boars, the Anglo-Saxon word for that animal being *eafor*. One of the most interesting examples, from our own neighbourhood, is furnished by the name of Edgebro', as it is now generally pronounced. Take its true name Edlesbro', and you recognise in it, merely from the name, this valuable historical fact, that it was formerly a royal residence, the *borough* of the *ethel* or royal family. You will trace this last word *ethel*

in the application given by the Saxon nobility to Edgar Atheling; that is, the Edgar who had royal blood in his veins,—the Edgar who by family and by right claimed the English crown, in opposition to the usurping Norman, William the Conqueror. It would be easy to produce illustrations which would detain us here for hours; but those which I have adduced are enough to let you see the sort of inference which may sometimes be gathered by topography from etymology.

Now to apply this to Leighton: I told you just now that I had considerable hesitation in agreeing with those antiquaries who think that the ancient Lygeanburgh is the modern Leighton Buzzard. Let me now tell you why. To say nothing of the change of the termination of the word, the change of *burgh* into *ton*, the beginning of the word presents difficulties which are insuperable. The name means a fortified town, or borough, situated on the river Lea. Now we all know that there is no such river near us here. But there is a river Lea which rises near Houghton Regis, runs through the parish of Luton, and thence passes into Herts; and I cannot but think that the fortified town, gained from the Britons by the Saxons, was situated upon its margin. Reference to a good map, or local acquaintance with the district, might perhaps enable

us to settle the question; but as I have access to neither, you must permit me to leave the matter in its present obscurity, as far as the Lygeanburgh of the Saxon chronicle is concerned. But what then is the meaning of the name of Leighton? It is generally easier to say what a thing is not, than what it is. Leighton is certainly not so named from the noble family of Leigh, whose connection with the town is of recent origin, comparatively speaking. Nor is it the *town* in the *lea*, for then its name would have been differently formed in early written documents. I would suggest, but with diffidence, that it is the *laigh* or *low town*, the town situated in a hollow; a designation which very correctly indicates its position, as is obvious to any one who approaches it from the Heath road, or the Billington road, or the Mentmore road, or the Wing road. As for its designation Buzzard, added of course to distinguish it from other towns of the same name, of which there are many in England, forgive me for assuring you that it was not so called from a remarkable buzzard, which flew over the church on the day of its dedication, the lively portraiture of which is yet to be seen in the north transept of our parish church. Nor can I think that it was so called from the family of Bosard, which is said to have resided here in early days. It is true that many noble families left their

names associated with the localities in which they resided, or had property. Thus, Aspley Guise is so called from a family of the name of Guise; Eaton Bray from a family of the name of Bray. The same remark applies to Hatley Cockaigne, Higham Gobion, Houghton Conquest, Milton Bryant, and others in this county. But there is no evidence of the existence of the family of Bosard either in this town or neighbourhood, at a period sufficiently early to warrant the adoption of this theory; and there is no evidence whatever to show that they ever had one single acre of land in this parish at any time. A more obvious derivation of the name is from the French *beaudesert*, "the pretty piece of uncultivated ground," an appellation which appears strange to us who are familiar with the high state of cultivation into which the neighbourhood has been brought by the industry and energy of some of our townsmen. Yet even this has its objections. But it is time that we returned to our historical investigations, and leave the regions of etymology; to which, however, I shall again conduct you before we conclude this lecture, in order that we may come to some sort of conclusion respecting the origin of this "buzzard" of ours.

We must be satisfied therefore with the negative evidence which has already passed before us, as far as the British, the Roman, and the Saxon periods

are concerned. Our history begins with the Norman era, an antiquity by no means to be disregarded; superior, be it remembered, to many towns of far greater pretensions. The earliest undisputed trace of Leighton occurs on the first page of the survey of Bedfordshire, contained in that venerable document called Domesday Book. But before I give you any analysis of the information there brought to light, it will be more satisfactory to us all if I occupy a few moments in informing you of the character of this Domesday Book, the circumstances under which it was compiled, and the nature of the evidence which it brings before us.

The battle of Hastings was fought between Harold the Saxon and William the Norman, in the year 1066. In that battle the Normans were victorious, the Saxon king was killed, and his army defeated. The Saxons made a few ineffectual attempts to preserve their independence as a nation; but their own disorganised and disunited condition, and the want of a head to consolidate these efforts, rendered them nugatory, and in the course of a few years the whole of England was under the control of the invaders. One of the first uses which William made of his newly acquired kingdom was to reward his followers who had accompanied him from Normandy. The assistance which he had obtained from his nobility was

entirely voluntary, and was evidently given with an especial regard to the possessions which they afterwards obtained in merry England. After the battle of Hastings, William seized, for his own share, the lands which had been Harold's, or had been in the possession of any of the subjugated royal family. The broad domains of the Saxon nobility were doled out to the officers of the Conqueror's army, apparently either in proportion to their previous rank in Normandy, or according to the supplies they had furnished for the expedition. Some of these donations of land were enormous. The earl of Mortain, the Conqueror's half brother, held no fewer than 793 manors, each manor being probably about as large as the whole of this parish. Alan, earl of Bretagne, who commanded the rear of the army at the battle of Hastings, possessed 442 manors. Odo, bishop of Baieux, held 439. This bishop was a soldier, and had contributed to the victory of Hastings. To come nearer home: William de Warren not only had a large extent of property in our neighbourhood, but his territorial allotments extended through the following counties, viz.—Buckinghamshire, Sussex, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Essex, Norfolk, and Suffolk. Hugh de Beauchamp possessed no fewer than twenty manors in this county, besides the

manors of Linchlade and Soulbury, in Buckinghamshire. Nigel de Albini had twelve, William Spec or Espec, and Walter Gifford, had six manors each. Judith, countess of Northumberland, had seven.

It is a curious circumstance that none of these immense estates appear to have continued in the hands of the Norman nobility of Bedfordshire beyond a few generations. The Albinis are the ancestors of the family of Mowbray, from which descend the ducal family of Norfolk ; but, as far as I am aware, they have not at this time a single foot of land in the county in which the first Nigel of the name had such a wide tract of domain. There is apparently one striking exception to this remark, and as it is connected with our own immediate neighbourhood, I bring it before your notice : I refer to the Lovett family. Domesday points to them as holding estates in Berkshire, Northamptonshire, and Leicestershire, with which we have nothing to do ; but it is interesting for us to remark that at the time of the compilation of this record, William Lovet held the manors of Crawley and Flitwick, in Bedfordshire.

This then was the state of England at the time of the Norman Conquest, and this information has come down to us through the venerable document called Domesday Book. The circumstances which led to the formation of this valuable survey next claim our

attention. With all his faults William was a great monarch, and had a comprehensive mind. Though he had acquired England, as he himself stated, *jure gladii*, by the right of the sword, he was anxious to promote its internal tranquility, and to bring its component parts under systematic jurisdiction. It is not necessary for us to enquire accurately into the causes which led to the formation of Domesday Book : it is enough for our present purpose to know that the survey was made somewhere about the year 1086, and that it has come down in an excellent state of preservation to our own day. The commissioners who prepared the returns from which it was compiled, were required to summon before them a jury, consisting of the sheriffs, the lord of the manor, the priest or priests of each church, the reeves of each hundred, the bailiffs, and six slaves, or villeins, as they were called. They were to enquire of this jury, upon their oaths, the name of the place, who held it in the time of King Edward the Confessor, who was the present possessor, of how much land it consisted, how many homagers and how many villeins it contained, what quantity of wood, how much meadow and pasture, how many mills and fish-ponds, what was the gross value in the time of King Edward, and what the present value. The commissioners proceeded with their inquiries through the whole of

Bedfordshire, and the result of their investigation is before us. I now invite your attention to the information which it furnishes respecting the early history of Leighton Buzzard and its more immediate neighbourhood.

The manor of Leighton was at this time in the king's own hands; it had formerly belonged to Harold therefore, or some of his family, or had been in the tenure of the late King Edward the Confessor. The inquisitors were bound, as you will remember, to enquire into the state of the manor during the Saxon period. The result of their inquiries informs us that before the Norman Conquest the manor contained 30 hides. Each hide apparently consisted of 120 acres; the whole manor, therefore, contained about 3600 acres,—an extent which apparently brings within its compass Heath, Eggington and Billington. But this was only the land which paid geld, or tribute; and a much greater extent of acreage must have been included within the manor; for the Norman jury returned that though there were only thirty hides at that prior time, yet, when the investigation was then being made, there were forty-seven carrucates which should be included in the estimate. The hide was the Saxon measure and the carrucate the Norman. It is not easy to state with accuracy their relative extent, but it is supposed that they were very nearly

identical. If it be so, how are we to account for the enormous difference between the rated acreage of the manor between these two dates, an interval of about twenty years? It is not easy to answer this question to our entire satisfaction; but it is an approximation to it to know, as we do from other sources, that Edward made his taxation as easy as he could upon his tenants, but the grasping Norman extorted from them the very uttermost farthing. This is rather a dry piece of statistical detail, but I do not well see how I could avoid inflicting it upon you, since our subsequent investigations would scarce be intelligible without it.

Again, respecting the external condition of the country, we learn from Domesday Book that there was on the king's manor a wood large enough for the feeding of a hundred swine. It is quite possible that the King's Wood near this town is the last lingering remnant of this royal forest. This implies an immense extent of wood, greater than we can easily find the means of appreciating, if we judge only by what we now know of the present condition of the manor. But we need not be surprised at this entry when we find that at Fulham, in the bishop of London's demesne land, perhaps on the very spot where his lordship's house now stands, was a wood fitted for the pasturage of a thousand swine; and stranger still,

a hundred of these same animals enjoyed themselves in the quiet seclusion of a forest, situated—where think you?—in Westminster! In the Domesday survey the woodland appears to have been everywhere carefully noted, for it afforded an important means of revenue. But to return to the swine. Our ancestors were passionately attached to the unclean animal. Entries similar to this occur in Domesday Book over and over again. The acorns and beech-mast on which they fed and fattened were most abundant when the country was in the very imperfect state of cultivation in which it then existed.

A short time ago I told you that I had some hesitation in assenting to the derivation of the latter part of the name of Leighton Buzzard either from the family of Bosard, or from the *beau desert* in which the town was situated. This is the best place to tell you what, in my opinion, is the real origin of the name. In fact I have a little private theory of my own upon the subject, which I will now unfold to you in confidence. You see that at the time of William I., Leighton was situated in a large forest. No less than a hundred swine found bed and board here in the King's Wood alone; to say nothing of the private establishments kept in those days for the use and behoof of the swine of the inhabitants. Now in progress of time this forest was gradually cleared away,

and the land was brought, field after field, within its present state of cultivation. This process of rooting up the trees was called "assarting." "To assart," was to fell the trees, to clear the land, and to bring the land into pasture or tillage. "An assart," was a piece of land, or a district, which had been reclaimed and brought into cultivation. After Leighton had undergone this process, and had become an assart, it was called no longer simply Leighton, but Leighton Buzzard—Leighton in the *beau assart*, or good clearing. In the Domesday Book it is called simply Leighton, because the process of clearing had not then begun: the forest stood in its primæval grandeur and extent. After the clearing had been finished, the explanatory designation was added; and it was henceforth known as Leighton Buzzard.

On the manor were two mills. During the feudal system, mills were of great value to the lord of the manor on which they were situated. The tenants were permitted to grind their corn only at the lord's mill, and he exacted a heavy tax from them upon this occasion. This circumstance sufficiently accounts, not only for the great number of mills noticed in the survey as objects of profit to the landholder, but also for the large sums which they are continually stated to yield. At Eaton, two mills are described as worth 36*s.* 6*d.* and 100 eels, by

the year; one at Aspley was worth 10*s*. The Leighton mills are valued at 30*s*. So carefully was this source of the lord's revenue looked after, that there is one instance in our neighbourhood in which it is stated, that the mill is out of repair and pays nothing; evidently implying that something ought to be done to make it available as a valuable source of revenue.

The sales and markets produced seven pounds, —a large sum, when we consider the difference in the value of money. The whole manor was worth, to the king, £22 a year, besides other profits.

So much for the land itself. We may gather a few hints respecting the condition of our ancestors from the information which the Domesday survey gives us of the inhabitants of Leighton. It must not be forgotten, however, that this survey was compiled for a specific purpose, and not with the view of supplying all the statistical information which *might* have been acquired, and which we would be glad to possess; and therefore we must not be surprised if on many points it leaves us in ignorance. I have now to read to you a startling announcement which it does make respecting the inhabitants of our town eight hundred years ago. It is stated that in Leighton there were eighty-two villeins. But I beg you to understand that the villeins of the days of William

the Conqueror were not the same kind of thing as the villains of our day. The villein of antiquity was one who excites our sorrow, not our indignation. He was a slave. Under the Saxon government there was a class of people in a condition of unmitigated slavery. They were used and employed in the most servile works. They, and their children, and their effects, belonged to the lords of the soil, just as much as the rest of the live cattle and stock upon it. Here in England, here in this very town, you might have bought a man, or a woman, or a child, from the lord of the manor; and suppose he were anxious to decrease his stock of such commodities during a hard winter, or a dear season, he might tempt you to buy by giving you an old woman or two into the bargain. When the Normans came into this island, they modified this system in some little degree; but the abomination still continued, and those unhappy beings who were in this state of slavery, now obtained the name of villeins. They could not leave the land to which they belonged without the permission of their lord: if they ran away, or were stolen—how strange the expression sounds!—he might recover them by action at law, as he might recover any other property. They held, indeed, small portions of land by way of sustaining themselves and their families; but this was at the mere good pleasure of the lord,

who might enter and dispossess them whenever he pleased; and it was upon villein service, as it was called,—that is, it was upon the condition that they should carry out manure, and hedge and ditch the lords demesne lands, and other of the meanest offices; and these offices were not only degrading in their kind, but uncertain as to their amount of time and quantity. A villein could acquire no property either in land or goods: but if he purchased either, the lord might seize them for his own benefit, and the law gave the injured man no redress. In many places, also, a fine was payable to the lord, if the villein presumed to marry his daughter to any one without the permission of the lord of the manor; and by the common law, the lord might also bring an action against the husband for damages in thus purloining his property. If a free woman married a villein, the children became the property of the lord, since they followed the condition of the father. Now at the time when the Domesday survey was compiled, there were eighty-two villeins, the king's property, in Leighton.

It would occupy too much of your time were I to proceed to enlarge upon the subject of villeinage. I may be permitted to state that nothing tended so much to the amelioration of this unhappy portion of our community as the unceasing efforts which were

made by the church of the middle ages. Acting upon the great Christian principle, that all mankind are brethren, that the church is the special champion of the weak, the oppressed, and the despised of the earth, and that in Christ there is neither bond nor free, the ecclesiastics of the middle ages waged an unceasing and an uncompromising war against the feudal system of villeinage. As she acquired property, the church enfranchised the slaves whom she found upon the soil, for some were annexed to the manor or land. When summoned to the bed of the dying landowner, his priest exhorted him, in token of the sincerity of his repentance towards God, and of his love to his brethren of mankind, to break the chain of the serf, for whom, no less than for himself, Christ had died. The law, too, interfered for the furtherance of the same good object; and yet it was not until several centuries after the Norman Conquest that this crying evil ceased from England.

The history of this class of our population, painfully interesting as it is in itself, has an additional claim upon the attention of many here present, since it is so intimately connected with the origin of copyhold tenure. It may not be amiss therefore to devote a few sentences to the elucidation of this part of the subject. I have stated that the lords granted to the villeins certain small portions of land for the support

of themselves and their families, but that this land was held at the will and pleasure of the lord, who might dispossess the tenant whenever he thought fit so to do. The tenant continuing from one generation to another upon the soil, in time acquired an interest in it, with which the lord found it difficult to interfere, sanctioned and protected as it was by the law, which is always ready to catch at any presumption in favour of the liberty of the subject. Thus custom, which is the life and soul of the common law, enabled the tenant to defend himself against the lord; and when the tenant was able and willing to perform the accustomed services, in virtue of which the land had been granted out, the law decreed that he should continue in the possession of the land, even though the lord should wish to dispossess him. For, though they were said to hold their estates at the will of the lord, yet the law decreed that this will must be in accordance with the usage and custom of the manor: and the nature of this custom is pointed out by the rolls of the several courts. And as these tenants had nothing to show for their estates but such customs, and admissions in pursuance of them, entered on these rolls, or the copies of such entries witnessed by the steward of the court, they were called tenants by copy of court roll, and the tenure itself was called a copyhold.

In the time of the Norman Conquest there was a church at Leighton, for it is mentioned in the Domesday survey. But for the present we must pass over this portion of our subject, as it demands and must receive a separate investigation.

Thus, then, we bid adieu to the history of our town and the district more immediately connected with it, as they existed during the reign of the first Norman king of England. The picture which the Domesday survey presents is by no means a pleasing one, if we estimate it only with regard to modern ideas of comfort, or refinement, or civilization. The town was in the midst of a forest. Savage animals were numerous; and a walk through the wood, which came to the very outskirts of the town, would probably lead to an interview with one or two wolves or wild boars, to say nothing of the chance of being tossed by a wild bull, or gored by a stag, or having your hand chopped off by the king's forester, upon the presumption that you had been poaching. In the town itself the houses were, probably without any exception, built of wood. The fireplace was in the midst of the room, and the smoke escaped by a hole made in the roof. The only fuel was wood, a ready and copious supply of which was afforded by the contiguous forest. The food of the inhabitants was much the same as that of which we partake,

with this very important difference, that they had no vegetables, no tea, no coffee, no sugar, scarce any of the fruit which is now so abundant, and during the greater part of the winter they subsisted almost entirely upon salted provisions; and worse than all, a large proportion of the population was in a state of bondage. Truly the picture is not a pleasing one; but we may derive from it one useful lesson,—and that is, in the midst of our present trials and troubles, and wants and privations, to remember, that if we have our difficulties to encounter, our ancestors had theirs, and they were greater and more numerous.

There is now a considerable interval in what we know of the descent of this manor. It is in no way connected with the general history of the realm, nor have we any indications from private sources of how matters went on for the next century. Let us hope that all proceeded quietly and peaceably, that the inhabitants cleared and cultivated their land, and did not pay too great attention to the game in the king's neighbouring forest. So we must pass over the reigns of William the Red King, and Henry I., and Stephen, with all their troubles and turmoils, external and internal; and let us now suppose ourselves to have reached the reign of King Henry II., when the manor of Leighton again meets us upon the pages of history. The change which was now effected by

that monarch was a decided and a permanent one, and its results were felt for several hundreds of years.

The half-manor of Leighton still, during the whole of this interval, remained in the king's hands. The other half is connected with the history of the church, upon which I cannot at present enter. Henry II. now granted to the abbess and convent of Fontevrault that portion of the manor which until now had been in the crown from the time of the Norman Conquest.

You will doubtless wish to become acquainted with this abbess, this new proprietress of so much land and power in our neighbourhood. I shall therefore beg leave to interrupt the series of this narrative, that I may give a slight outline of the history of the monastic establishment of Fontevrault. It must necessarily be brief, for time wears apace; but the abbess must have played such a very prominent part in the history of our parish, that we must not venture to pass her by unnoticed.

The monastic establishment of Fontevrault is situated, as you may gather from the name, in France. It was founded by Robert de Arbrussel, who died A.D. 1117, and it soon attained a great popularity and corresponding wealth and influence. It was an especial favourite with our Henry II. He invited

the abbess to send a colony of her nuns into England ; they came in 1177, and settled at Amesbury in Wiltshire. They had other houses in England at the period of the suppression of the alien priories by Henry V. The abbess of Fontevrault had immense possessions. The half-manor of Leighton would be to her a comparatively trifling donation. Her order extended itself not only over France, but into Spain, where it was equally admired and protected. One peculiarity of the foundation was this, that although there were monks as well as nuns of the order, they both were under the controul of the abbess. There was no abbot of Fontevrault, though there are monks of Fontevrault. Her houses were exempt from the ordinary jurisdiction of the bishop in whose diocese they might be situated, and owed obedience to herself alone. Her appeal was immediately to the pope, and she recognised no other power short of that exercised by the apostolic see. She placed a small establishment of monks near Leighton, at Grovebury, who doubtless managed her concerns. The outline of the chapel is still visible at that place. Such then was the position of affairs when the charter of Henry II. to this abbess gave her half of the manor. But before I proceed further with this subject, permit me to exhibit to you two coloured drawings of the abbess of Fontevrault, copied from

engravings of authority. We owe them to the kind and ready pencil of Miss Ouvry of Mentmore, to whom I beg leave, in the name of this meeting and my own, to offer our thanks for the interest which they add to this lecture.

It was customary, in the middle ages, when a grant of lands was made, to embody in a legal document an exact statement of the territorial privileges which went with these lands. When a grant was made by the sovereign, a copy of the deed was preserved, and these copies are kept in the Record Office in the Tower. Although these enrolments, as a series, do not begin until the reign of King John, the son of Henry II., yet copies are preserved of many of the charters which were granted before the reign of that former monarch; and among these is found a copy of the charter granted by Henry II. to the abbess of Fontevrault. I have obtained a copy of it from the Tower; and as it enters pretty fully into that lady's privileges, let us see what she could do, and doubtless did, in the times of our forefathers. It is a long document; it is in Latin, and it abounds in legal technicalities. You will not be sorry, I presume, if I give you an outline of its contents put into every-day English. Her power was limited during the reign of Henry II., but it gradually expanded by virtue of grants from his successors, until

it had attained an extent which must have made the lady abbess a very influential, and at the same time a very formidable person.

Thus, Richard I. confirmed and augmented the donation made by his father Henry II.; and his brother, the worthless King John, still further added to the power and wealth of that establishment. The circumstances which I have already mentioned, and especially the burial of Henry II., Richard I., and the wife of King John, within the walls of Fontevrault, must naturally have made it an object of especial interest with the royal family of England. These kings, Richard and John, extended the abbess's jurisdiction, and gave her a number of extraordinary privileges. I will read them to you first from a copy of the Latin abstract of them which she herself produced before the king's commissioner, when, at a subsequent date, she was required to state the grant by virtue of which she claimed the exercise of her wide and sweeping authority. But it is only fair that I should put the nature and the meaning of these privileges which she enjoyed into language somewhat more intelligible. She had the power to administer justice, to hold courts and to execute their sentence within the jurisdiction of her own manor. She had a toll upon the sale of all tollable commodities

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